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TAGS: PGOV PREL FR

SUBJECT: FRANCE MFA MID-EAST DIRECTOR ON IRAN: WATCHING AND
WAITING

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor Andrew R. Young for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) MFA Middle East Director (Assistant Secretary-equivalent) Patrice Paoli told Political Minister Counselor June 18 that despite initial worries over the weekend about the election results in Iran, the GOF has now committed to watching events unfold before deciding their policy approach toward the next government of Iran. "But we will not allow these events or the next government to delay the nuclear question," Paoli stated, which we interpret to mean the GOF is committed to continuing the current strategy of addressing our shared concerns about Iran's nuclear program. Paoli explained that the French believe Supreme Leader Khamene'i deliberately chose to manipulate the election results. MFA DAS Franck Gellet, who also attended the meeting, detailed the main reasons why the GOF believes the election results were fraudulent, including the attribution of merely 300,000 votes to Mehdi Karroubi (after he received 5 million votes in 2005); the alleged support of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad by the majority of Azeri voters; and the unprecedented speed with which the Interior Ministry announced the results.

¶2. (C) As to what may happen next in Iran, Paoli said that the French believe, based on their reporting and observations from Teheran, that "now anything is possible." Events could move in any direction; although the protesters are not challenging the regime itself, the protests have taken on a life of their own. We are witnessing the "first major fissure in the system," Paoli said. It is now "a battle of the conservatives around Khamene'i against the rest." While no one can predict whether the recent protests are sufficient to precipitate significant change, Paoli explained, "the signs and symbols" of this past week are extremely important, and harken back to 1978. Gellet cited in particular the chants of "allah hu akbar" from rooftops in Teheran, persistent mass mobilization, and the nationwide reach of the protests.

¶3. (C) Moving past the elections, Paoli reported that the Government of Saudi Arabia informed him during a recent trip to Riyadh that the Saudis had demarched the Chinese and Russian governments to ask them to press the Iranians to halt their nuclear program. "If you want oil from us," the Saudi diplomats claimed to have said to their Chinese counterparts, "then you must put more pressure on Iran." Paoli suggested that the USG encourage the other Gulf countries to send a similar, strong message to both Russia and China.

PEKALA